

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

“AN editor,” says Dr. Johnson, is “he that revises or prepares any work for publication;” and this definition of an editor’s duty seems wholly right and satisfactory. But now that the revision of these letters is apparently complete, the reader has some right to expect a formal introduction to a lady whose name he has, in all probability, never heard; and one may not be overstepping the modest and Johnsonian limits of an editor’s office, when the writing of a short introduction is included among the duties of preparation.

Dorothy Osborne was the wife of the famous Sir William Temple, and apology for her biography will be found in her own letters, here for the first time published. Some of them have indeed been printed in a *Life of Sir William Temple* by the Right Honourable Thomas Peregrine Courtenay, a man better known to the Tory politician of fifty years ago than to any world of letters in that day or this. Forty-two extracts from these letters did Courtenay transfer to an Appendix, without arrangement or any form of editing, as he candidly confesses; but not without misgivings as to how they would be received by a people thirsting to read the details of the negotiations which took place in connection with the Triple Alliance. If Courtenay lived to learn that the world had other things

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Edited by Edward Abbott Parry

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to do than pore over dull excerpts from inhuman State papers, we may pity his awakening ; but we can never quite forgive the apologetic paragraph with which he relegates Dorothy Osborne's letters to the mouldy obscurity of an Appendix.

When Macaulay was reviewing Courtenay's book in the *Edinburgh Review*, he took occasion to write a short but living sketch of the early history of Sir William Temple and Dorothy Osborne. And with this account so admirably written, ready at hand, it becomes the clear duty of the Editor to quote rather than to rewrite ; which he does with the greater pleasure, remembering that it was this very passage that first led him to read the letters of Dorothy Osborne.

“William Temple, Sir John's eldest son, was born in London in the year 1628. He received his early education under his maternal uncle, was subsequently sent to school at Bishop-Stortford, and, at seventeen, began to reside at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, where the celebrated Cudworth was his tutor. The times were not favourable to study. The Civil War disturbed even the quiet cloisters and bowling-greens of Cambridge, produced violent revolutions in the government and discipline of the colleges, and unsettled the minds of the students. Temple forgot at Emmanuel all the little Greek which he had brought from Bishop-Stortford, and never retrieved the loss ; a circumstance which would hardly be worth noticing but for the almost incredible fact, that fifty years later he was so absurd as to set up his own authority against that of Bentley on questions of Greek history and philology. He made no proficiency, either in the old philosophy which still lingered in the schools of Cambridge, or in the new philosophy of which Lord Bacon was the founder. But to the end of his life

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he continued to speak of the former with ignorant admiration, and of the latter with equally ignorant contempt.

“After residing at Cambridge two years, he departed without taking a degree, and set out upon his travels. He seems to have been then a lively, agreeable young man of fashion, not by any means deeply read, but versed in all the superficial accomplishments of a gentleman, and acceptable in all polite societies. In politics he professed himself a Royalist. His opinions on religious subjects seem to have been such as might be expected from a young man of quick parts, who had received a rambling education, who had not thought deeply, who had been disgusted by the morose austerity of the Puritans, and who, surrounded from childhood by the hubbub of conflicting sects, might easily learn to feel an impartial contempt for them all.

“On his road to France he fell in with the son and daughter of Sir Peter Osborne. Sir Peter held Guernsey for the King, and the young people were, like their father, warm for the Royal cause. At an inn where they stopped in the Isle of Wight, the brother amused himself with inscribing on the windows his opinion of the ruling powers. For this instance of malignancy the whole party were arrested, and brought before the Governor. The sister, trusting to the tenderness which, even in those troubled times, scarcely any gentleman of any party ever failed to show where a woman was concerned, took the crime on herself, and was immediately set at liberty with her fellow-travellers.

“This incident, as was natural, made a deep impression on Temple. He was only twenty. Dorothy Osborne was twenty-one. She is said to have been handsome; and there remains abundant proof that she possessed

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an ample share of the dexterity, the vivacity, and the tenderness of her sex. Temple soon became, in the phrase of that time, her servant, and she returned his regard. But difficulties, as great as ever expanded a novel to the fifth volume, opposed their wishes. When the courtship commenced, the father of the hero was sitting in the Long Parliament; the father of the heroine was commanding in Guernsey for King Charles. Even when the war ended, and Sir Peter Osborne returned to his seat at Chicksands, the prospects of the lovers were scarcely less gloomy. Sir John Temple had a more advantageous alliance in view for his son. Dorothy Osborne was in the meantime besieged by as many suitors as were drawn to Belmont by the fame of Portia. The most distinguished on the list was Henry Cromwell. Destitute of the capacity, the energy, the magnanimity of his illustrious father, destitute also of the meek and placid virtues of his elder brother, this young man was perhaps a more formidable rival in love than either of them would have been. Mrs. Hutchinson, speaking the sentiments of the grave and aged, describes him as an ‘insolent foole,’ and a ‘debauched ungodly cavalier.’ These expressions probably mean that he was one who, among young and dissipated people, would pass for a fine gentleman. Dorothy was fond of dogs, of larger and more formidable breed than those which lie on modern hearthrugs; and Henry Cromwell promised that the highest functionaries at Dublin should be set to work to procure her a fine Irish greyhound. She seems to have felt his attentions as very flattering, though his father was then only Lord General, and not yet Protector. Love, however, triumphed over ambition, and the young lady appears never to have regretted her

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decision; though, in a letter written just at the time when all England was ringing with the news of the violent dissolution of the Long Parliament, she could not refrain from reminding Temple with pardonable vanity, 'how great she might have been, if she had been so wise as to have taken hold of the offer of H. C.'

"Nor was it only the influence of rivals that Temple had to dread. The relations of his mistress regarded him with personal dislike, and spoke of him as an unprincipled adventurer, without honour or religion, ready to render service to any party for the sake of preferment. This is, indeed, a very distorted view of Temple's character. Yet a character, even in the most distorted view taken of it by the most angry and prejudiced minds, generally retains something of its outline. No caricaturist ever represented Mr. Pitt as a Falstaff, or Mr. Fox as a skeleton; nor did any libeller ever impute parsimony to Sheridan, or profusion to Marlborough. It must be allowed that the turn of mind which the eulogists of Temple have dignified with the appellation of philosophical indifference, and which, however becoming it may be in an old and experienced statesman, has a somewhat ungraceful appearance in youth, might easily appear shocking to a family who were ready to fight or to suffer martyrdom for their exiled King and their persecuted Church. The poor girl was exceedingly hurt and irritated by these imputations on her lover, defended him warmly behind his back, and addressed to himself some very tender and anxious admonitions, mingled with assurances of her confidence in his honour and virtue. On one occasion she was most highly provoked by the way in which one of her brothers spoke of Temple. 'We talked ourselves weary,' she says; 'he renounced me, and I defied him.'

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“Near seven years did this arduous wooing continue. We are not accurately informed respecting Temple’s movements during that time. But he seems to have led a rambling life, sometimes on the Continent, sometimes in Ireland, sometimes in London. He made himself master of the French and Spanish languages, and amused himself by writing essays and romances, an employment which at least served the purpose of forming his style. The specimen which Mr. Courtenay has preserved of these early compositions is by no means contemptible: indeed, there is one passage on Like and Dislike, which could have been produced only by a mind habituated carefully to reflect on its own operations, and which reminds us of the best things in Montaigne.

“Temple appears to have kept up a very active correspondence with his mistress. His letters are lost, but hers have been preserved; and many of them appear in these volumes. Mr. Courtenay expresses some doubt whether his readers will think him justified in inserting so large a number of these epistles. We only wish that there were twice as many. Very little indeed of the diplomatic correspondence of that generation is so well worth reading.”

Here Macaulay indulges in an eloquent but lengthy philippic against that “vile phrase” the “dignity of history,” which we may omit,—taking up the thread of his discourse where he recurs to the affairs of our two lovers. “Thinking thus,”—concerning the “dignity of history,”—“we are glad to learn so much, and would willingly learn more about the loves of Sir William and his mistress. In the seventeenth century, to be sure, Louis the Fourteenth was a much more important person than Temple’s sweetheart. But death and time

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equalize all things. Neither the great King nor the beauty of Bedfordshire, neither the gorgeous paradise of Marli nor Mistress Osborne's favourite walk 'in the common that lay hard by the house, where a great many young wenches used to keep sheep and cows and sit in the shade singing of ballads,' is anything to us. Louis and Dorothy are alike dust. A cotton-mill stands on the ruins of Marli; and the Osbornes have ceased to dwell under the ancient roof of Chicksands. But of that information, for the sake of which alone it is worth while to study remote events, we find so much in the love letters which Mr. Courtenay has published, that we would gladly purchase equally interesting billets with ten times their weight in State papers taken at random. To us surely it is as useful to know how the young ladies of England employed themselves a hundred and eighty years ago, how far their minds were cultivated, what were their favourite studies, what degree of liberty was allowed to them, what use they made of that liberty, what accomplishments they most valued in men, and what proofs of tenderness delicacy permitted them to give to favoured suitors, as to know all about the seizure of Franche-Comté and the Treaty of Nimeguen. The mutual relations of the two sexes seem to us to be at least as important as the mutual relations of any two Governments in the world; and a series of letters written by a virtuous, amiable, and sensible girl, and intended for the eye of her lover alone, can scarcely fail to throw some light on the relations of the sexes; whereas it is perfectly possible, as all who have made any historical researches can attest, to read bale after bale of despatches and protocols, without catching one glimpse of light about the relations of Governments.

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“Mr. Courtenay proclaims that he is one of Dorothy Osborne’s devoted servants, and expresses a hope that the publication of her letters will add to the number. We must declare ourselves his rivals. She really seems to have been a very charming young woman, modest, generous, affectionate, intelligent, and sprightly; a Royalist, as was to be expected from her connections, without any of that political asperity which is as unwomanly as a long beard; religious, and occasionally gliding into a very pretty and endearing sort of preaching, yet not too good to partake of such diversions as London afforded under the melancholy rule of the Puritans, or to giggle a little at a ridiculous sermon from a divine who was thought to be one of the great lights of the Assembly at Westminster; with a little turn for coquetry, which was yet perfectly compatible with warm and disinterested attachment, and a little turn for satire, which yet seldom passed the bounds of good nature. She loved reading; but her studies were not those of Queen Elizabeth and Lady Jane Grey. She read the verses of Cowley and Lord Broghill, French Memoirs recommended by her lover, and the Travels of Fernando Mendez Pinto. But her favourite books were those ponderous French romances which modern readers know chiefly from the pleasant satire of Charlotte Lennox. She could not, however, help laughing at the vile English into which they were translated. Her own style is very agreeable; nor are her letters at all the worse for some passages in which raillery and tenderness are mixed in a very engaging namby-pamby.

“When at last the constancy of the lovers had triumphed over all the obstacles which kinsmen and rivals could oppose to their union, a yet more serious calamity befell them. .Poor Mistress Osborne fell ill of

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the small-pox, and, though she escaped with life, lost all her beauty. To this most severe trial the affection and honour of the lovers of that age was not unfrequently subjected. Our readers probably remember what Mrs. Hutchinson tells us of herself. The lofty Cornelia-like spirit of the aged matron seems to melt into a long forgotten softness when she relates how her beloved Colonel 'married her as soon as she was able to quit the chamber, when the priest and all that saw her were affrighted to look on her. But God,' she adds, with a not ungraceful vanity, 'recompensed his justice and constancy by restoring her as well as before.' Temple showed on this occasion the same justice and constancy which did so much honour to Colonel Hutchinson. The date of the marriage is not exactly known, but Mr. Courtenay supposes it to have taken place about the end of the year 1654. From this time we lose sight of Dorothy, and are reduced to form our opinion of the terms on which she and her husband were from very slight indications which may easily mislead us."

When an editor is in the pleasant position of being able to retain an historian of the eminence of Macaulay to write a large portion of his introduction, it would ill become him to alter and correct his statements wherever there was a petty inaccuracy; still it is necessary to say, once for all, that there are occasional errors in the passage,—as where Macaulay mentions that Chicksands is no longer the property of the Osbornes,—though happily not one of these errors is in itself important. To our thinking, too, in the character that he draws of our heroine, Macaulay hardly appears to be sufficiently aware of the sympathetic womanly nature of Dorothy, and the dignity of her disposition; so that he

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is persuaded to speak of her too constantly from the position of a man of the world praising with patronizing emphasis the pretty qualities of a school-girl. But we must remember, that in forming our estimate of her character, we have an extended series of letters before us; and from these the reader can draw his own conclusions as to the accuracy of Macaulay's description, and the importance of Dorothy's character.

It was this passage from Macaulay that led the Editor to Courtenay's Appendix, and it was the literary and human charm of the letters themselves that suggested the idea of stringing them together into a connected story or sketch of the love affairs of Dorothy Osborne. This was published in April 1886 in the *English Illustrated Magazine*, and happened, by good luck, to fall into the hands of an admirer of Dorothy, who, having had access to the original letters, had made faithful and loving copies of each one,—accurate even to the old-world spelling. These labours had been followed up by much patient research, the fruits of which were now to be generously offered to the present Editor on condition that he would prepare the letters for the press. The owner of the letters having courteously expressed his acquiescence, nothing remained but to give to the task that patient care that it is easy to give to a labour of love.

A few words of explanation as to the arrangement of the letters. Although few of them were dated, it was found possible, by minute analysis of their contents, to place them in approximately correct order; and if one could not date each letter, one could at least assign groups of letters to specific months or seasons of the year. The fact that New Year's day was at this period March 25—a fact sometimes ignored by antiquarians